



Crime

In the 2016 Utah Priorities Project, *crime* ranked seventh among issues concerning Utahns. While sixth in 2004 and 2008, it dropped to twelfth for 2010 and 2012. However, the reemergence back on the top-ten list is not necessarily related to an increase in crime. In fact, violent crime and property crime rates remain at 50-year lows nationally and have been on a downward trend in Utah over the past 20 years.¹

SURVEY RESPONSES

Every two years, Utah Foundation creates the Quality of Life Index from a representative sample of Utahns. Since the first index in 2011, “safety and security from crime” has been considered the most important aspect in determining Utahns’ quality of life.²

In the Utah Priorities Project survey, nearly 56% of Utah voters expressed a high level of concern (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) for *crime*. More women (62%) have a high level of concern about *crime* than men (49%). Utah voters were also asked whether they agreed with the statement that they are more worried about crime than they were five years ago.³ Half of Utah voters agreed, while 22% were neutral and 28% disagreed. Women are more likely to agree that they are more worried than men about crime now than five year previous (57% compared to 43%). These concerns could be in response to a number of factors, including the recent uptick in Utah’s homicide rate and media attention given to the recent increase in active shooter incidents across the nation.

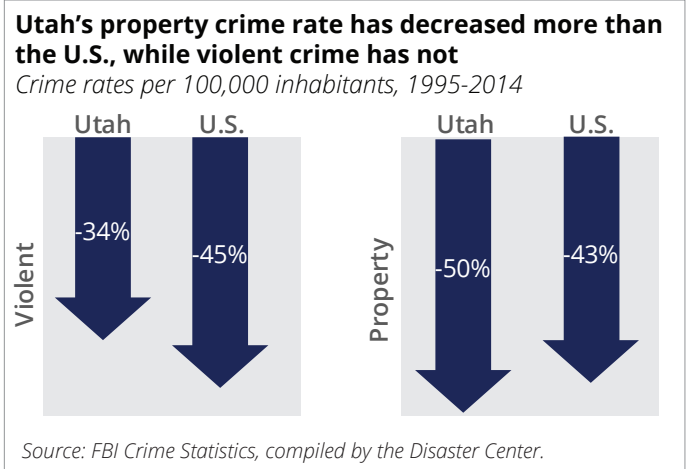
VIOLENT AND PROPERTY CRIMES

This brief focuses primarily on “Part I” crimes, which consist of violent and property crimes. All other crimes (such as drug offenses and white collar crimes) are classified as “Part II.” Traffic violations have their own category.⁴ Overall, Part I crimes in Utah – and the U.S. – have been decreasing for decades.

In 2014 (the most recent comprehensive data available) there were 6,346 violent crimes and 84,711 property crimes in Utah.⁵ Usually measured per 100,000 inhabitants, these crimes equate to a violent crime rate of 216 and a property crime rate of 2,879.⁶

Violent crime rates have been decreasing in the Utah and the U.S. over the past two decades. While down by 34% in Utah, national violent crime rates have decreased by 45% since 1995, and even further since peak U.S. violent crimes rates in 1991 and 1992. Researchers attribute these decreases to myriad societal changes, including a reduction in childhood lead exposure through the

second half of the twentieth century and the decline of the crack cocaine epidemic in the early 1990s. In addition, property crime rates have dropped by half in Utah and 43% across the nation over the past two decades.



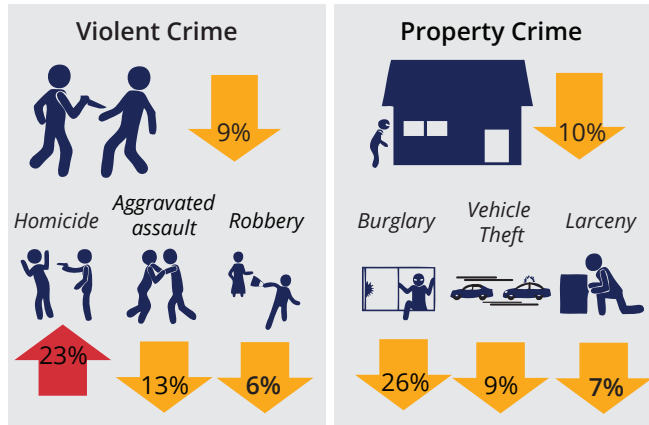
Crime rates are affected by numerous factors, including density and size of population, socioeconomic status, effective strength of law enforcement, and even seasonal weather conditions.⁷ Not only are crime rates higher in urban areas (see the table in the endnote), voters on the Wasatch Front ranked crime as a higher concern than their more rural counterparts.⁸

SPECIFIC CRIMES IN UTAH

Violent crime in Utah decreased by 4% from 2013 to 2014. Even though the number of homicides, rapes, and robberies increased in 2014, they were offset by a decrease in aggravated assaults which account for about three-fifths of all violent crime.⁹ Homicides jumped 10% in 2014, with 56 incidents of murder and non-negligent manslaughter. This homicide rate is 23% above the ten-year average. While it is the highest homicide rate since 2005, there does not seem to be an upward trend over time, and the 2014 homicide rate is still lower than any of the 1990s. Over one-third of these homicides involved family members and

Most Utah crime rates below ten-year average, though homicides are up

Utah 2014 crime rates compared to 2005-2014 average



Note: Data for rape and arson are not included; 2014 rape rate is the same as compared to ten year period. Crime rates are per 100,000 residents. Source: Utah Department of Public Safety.

over half were committed with firearms. The reported incidence of rape increased by 8% to 994, though the rape crime rate that year is at the 10-year average. Robberies saw a 2% increase in 2014, though the robbery rate is below the ten-year average.

The number of property crimes decreased by 5% from 2013 to 2014. All types of property crimes decreased except for motor vehicle thefts. Burglary is the unlawful entry into a structure with the intent to commit a crime. These were down 16% in Utah over the period. Larceny is the unlawful taking of personal property. These were down by 3%. In Utah, nearly \$100 million of property was stolen in 2014, with about 28% recovered. Of all the Part I crimes, larceny is far and away the most common, followed by burglary and motor vehicle theft, all of which are property crimes. (See the figure for details.)

In Utah, the “past month” illicit drug use rate was 7.3% among adults during 2013-2014, a full 2.5% below national usage.¹⁰ Utah had the seventh lowest rate in the country.¹¹ The rate for illicit drug dependence or abuse is 2.6% among adults, though 6.1% for young adults aged 18 to 25 – which rates are similar to the rest of the nation.¹² While not necessarily considered crimes, the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs in Utah has led to a 400% increase in overdose deaths over the past 15 years.¹³ Utah ranked 4th in the U.S. for prescription drug overdose deaths from 2012-2014, with an average of 24 Utahns dying from prescription drug overdoses each month.

PUBLIC POLICY APPROACHES TO CRIME

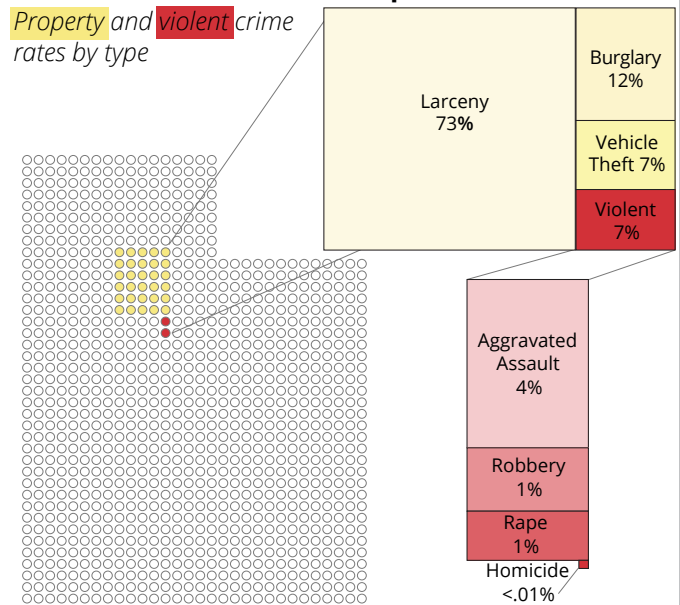
Even with Utah’s decreasing crime rates, Utah’s policy makers are seeking further improvements. A criminal justice reform

bill developed with the help of the U.S. Department of Justice and Pew Charitable Trusts was signed into Utah law in 2015. The law aims to avoid nearly all Utah’s prison growth over the next 20 years at a cost savings to the state totaling \$500 million. It prioritizes prison space for violent offenders and implements comprehensive treatment and reentry programming for offenders. The bill reduces some drug possession convictions to misdemeanors and changes many misdemeanor violations to simple citations which are no longer subject to arrest or jail.¹⁴

In addition, Salt Lake County is implementing a Pay for Success program to reduce recidivism, particularly among the county’s homeless population. First Step House – a county-based non-profit organization – will be leading the provision of treatment services under the program. Using the Pay for Success model, the county is seeking \$10 million from investors for these services. Depending upon the effectiveness of the program, investors will be repaid through savings of county justice costs. Effectiveness will be based upon comparing the recidivism and length of stay in jail for offenders that are served under the program against a similar group that does not receive program services.¹⁵

Crime affects only a small portion of Utahns, and violent crime a smaller portion still

Property and violent crime rates by type



Note: Arson, excluded in this figure, is 0.3% of Part I crimes. Figures do not sum due to rounding. Source: Utah Department of Public Safety.

This research brief was written by Utah Foundation Research Intern Fatema Ahad and Research Director Shawn Teigen.

For endnotes see the brief at www.utahfoundation.org.

The mission of Utah Foundation is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change. The 2016 Utah Priorities Project has been funded by generous donations from Union Pacific, the George and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, the Larry H. and Gail Miller Family Foundation, and Zions Bank.